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NEW YORK TIMES

POWER AND SAINTLY PURITY

BY PEREGRINE WORSTHORNE

LONDON-ANY PUBLIC MAN WHO HAS EVER SUCCEEDED IN DOING ANYTHING MUST BE AWARE OF HOW VULNERABLE HIS CONDUCT IS TO MORAL JUDGEMENT. EVERY BIOGRAPHY OF A GREAT STATESMAN BEARS THIS OUT. THERE ARE ALWAYS SKELETONS IN THE CUPBOARD; ALWAYS INCIDENTS WHERE EVEN THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND HEROIC FIGURE BEHAVED WITH LESS THAN TOTAL HONESTY OR TRUTHFULNESS.

SUCH A STATEMENT IS CERTAINLY NOT INTENDED TO BE PROVOCATIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL. IT IS, OF COURSE, THE MEREST TRUISM. THE EXERCISE OF POWER CANNOT BE COMBINED WITH SAINTLY PURITY, SINCE ONCE A MAN ASSUMES RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE MORAL SIMPLICITIES WITHIN WHICH IT IS JUST POSSIBLE, WITH LUCK, TO BE ABLE TO LEAD A PRIVATE LIFE AS SOON HIDE-OUSLY COMPLICATED TO AN EXTENT THAT PRECLUDES ALL CLEAR DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG.

A HEALTHY PUBLIC OPINION UNDERSTANDS THIS, AND JUDGES ITS PUBLIC MEN ACCORDINGLY, ALLOWING THEM SOME LATITUDE. IT IS ALWAYS A QUESTION OF APPLYING A SENSE OF PROPORTION OF TURNING A JUDICIOUSLY BLIND EYE, OF HAVING A FEEL FOR WHAT IS EXCUSABLE AND WHAT IS NOT. MASS OPINION SOMETIMES NEEDS GUIDANCE IN THESE MATTERS, WHICH IS WHAT A PROPERLY FUNCTIONING "ESTABLISHMENT," OR GOVERNING ORDER, SHOULD BE ABLE TO SUPPLY.

WHAT IS SO DISTURGING ABOUT THE KISSINGER AFFAIR IS THAT IT DEMONSTRATES A TOTAL FAILURE BY THE AMERICAN LIBERAL ESTABLISHMENT TO DO PRECISELY THAT; WORSE, ON AN ALMOST HYSTERICAL DETERMINATION TO DO PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE.

BY ANY STANDARDS OF COMMON SENSE IT IS RIDICULOUS THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE SHOULD BE SO UNNECESSARILY INVOLVED IN A MAJOR ROW THREATENING HIS MORAL CREDIBILITY. YET THE QUALITY PRESS, WHOSE JOB IT OUGHT TO BE TO GET THESE MATTERS RIGHT,

TO ARTICULATE THE ESTABLISHMENT VOICE OF WORLDLY WISDOM, HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN GETTING THEM WRONG AND ARTICULATING THE VOICE OF UNWORLDLY STUPIDITY.

IT MAY WELL BE THAT HENRY A. KISSINGER WAS RATHER LESS THAN FRANK IN HIS SENATE EVIDENCE ABOUT THE PART HE PLAYED IN THE TELEPHONE TAPPING OF HIS COLLEAGUES, AND OF CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE PRESS. POSSIBLY THE DOCUMENTS WILL SHOW THAT HE DID MORE THAN ASSENT TO IT, AND POSITIVELY ENCOURAGED AND EVEN ORDERED IT.

MORE LIKELY IT WILL SHOW NOTHING WHOLLY CONCLUSIVE EITHER WAY. BUT THIS SURELY IS NOT THE POINT. THE POINT IS THAT THE QUESTION IS NOT TERRIBLY IMPORTANT; CERTAINLY NOT IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO RISK ENDANGERING THE AMERICAN NATIONAL INTEREST BY DISCREDITING A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL SECRETARY OF STATE.

TO SOME EXTENT THIS CAN OBVIOUSLY BE EXPLAINED BY WATERGATE, WHICH HAS SHOWN THE DANGERS OF EXCESSIVE CYNICISM. BUT AN ATTITUDE TO THE EXERCISE OF POWER WHICH CONTAINS TOO LITTLE CYNICISM IS QUITE AS DANGEROUS AS ONE WHICH CONTAINS TOO MUCH. AND IN THE AFTERMATH OF WATERGATE, THIS SECOND DANGER MAY BE THE ONE THAT NEEDS WATCHING MOST.

WHAT IS NEW TODAY IN ALL ADVANCED SOCIETIES IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH INTELLECTUALS DETERMINE THE CLIMATE OF ESTABLISHMENT OPINION BECAUSE, WITH THE DEPENDENCE OF ALMOST ALL FORMS OF LARGE ORGANIZATION ON SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE, ACADEMICS HAVE BECOME SO MUCH MORE AN INTEGRAL AND HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL PART OF THE POWER STRUCTURE THAN EVER THEY WERE BEFORE. BUT THEY DO NOT FEEL AT HOME IN IT. THEIRS IS THE WORLD OF THEORY, OF CONCEPTS, OF IDEALS, OR TALKING RATHER THAN DOING.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, IN SHORT, THE NEW POWER STRUCTURES INCLUDE AN ELEMENT OF GROWING INFLUENCE-BASED ON BRAIN POWER- WHICH FINDS THE MORAL AMBIVALENCE INHERENT IN THE EXERCISE OF POWER ALIEN, NOT TO SAY SHOCKING, TO ITS OWN VALUES.

THAT THIS DEVELOPMENT SHOULD COINCIDE WITH WATERGATE IS DISTINCTLY UNFORTUNATE FOR THE UNITED STATES, SINCE EVERYTHING ABOUT THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION HAS SEEMED TO JUSTIFY AND DEEPEN THIS RESISTANCE TO A PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PAINFUL AND UGLY REALITIES OF POWER. BUT THE ABSURD KISSINGER AFFAIR SURELY UNDERLINES HOW DANGEROUS IT IS IF PUBLIC OPINION COMES TO BE DOMINATED BY INFLUENCES CONSTITUTIONALLY INCAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING THESE REALITIES.

NOTHING WOULD BE GAINED IF, IN ESCAPING FROM THE NIGHTMARE WORLD OF RICHARD NIXON AND WATERGATE, THE UNITED STATES

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